



Tax Identity Theft Awareness Week Turns Spotlight on Smart Filing Practices

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MADISON – Tax fraud involving identity theft has been a big news item over the past couple of years, with stories of consumers submitting their tax returns only to find that criminals have already filed returns using their Social Security Numbers and identities. It is a growing concern nationwide and has affected a number of Wisconsin residents.

“Tax Identity Theft Awareness Week” is underway, and the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) is asking Wisconsin taxpayers to take steps to protect their personal information and to use caution when filing their taxes.

“In Wisconsin, we’ve seen problems with fraudulent tax preparers, so it’s important that you choose your tax preparer carefully,” said Sandy Chalmers, Division Administrator for Trade and Consumer Protection. “Also, don’t believe calls or emails that say they’re from the IRS – that’s a trick to get your personal information.”

Tax scammers have a number of ways of getting at a consumer’s personal information, including data breaches, theft of medical or banking records, access to personal computers using malware or “dumpster diving” for paper records.

“Your best protection against tax fraud is to safeguard your private information year-round,” said Chalmers. “At a minimum, consumers should shred personal documents, use strong internet passwords and never give out personal information through unsolicited phone calls or emails.”

The IRS will contact you by mail if they suspect that you are the victim of tax identity theft. The IRS will not contact you by phone, email or text message. If your identity has been compromised, call the IRS ID Theft Protection Specialized Unit at 1-800-908-4490.

To avoid becoming the victim of tax identity theft fraud, consider the following tips:

- If possible, file your taxes early in the season to get a jump on a potential scammer.
- If you file your taxes online, use a secure connection – not a public WiFi network. Update your operating system or anti-virus software ahead of time.
- If you file by mail, take your return directly to the post office rather than leaving it in an unsecured mailbox.
- Before choosing a tax preparer, do your research and get references from other clients.
- Shred any unnecessary copies of your tax return, calculation sheets or supporting documentation.
- Never give out any personal or banking information on an unsolicited phone call or in response to an unsolicited email.
- If you suspect that your identity may have been stolen, check your credit report to ensure that no new accounts have been created in your name. Visit www.annualcreditreport.com to get a copy of your report from the three major credit bureaus.

(MORE)

- Anyone suspecting fraudulent activity is encouraged to file a complaint with DATCP. File a complaint online at datcp.wi.gov or call the state's Consumer Information Hotline at 800-422-7128 and request a complaint form.
- To further protect consumers from tax scams, DATCP asks Wisconsin residents to notify the state if they see questionable practices at tax preparation businesses. Complaints can be filed online through the DATCP website or using a DATCP complaint form.

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